

**HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM QUALITY REVIEW
UNION COUNTY DSS
SEPTEMBER 2001**

The South Carolina Department of Social Services Human Services Division conducted a qualitative review of Union County DSS in Fall 2001.

The review was conducted on site, and consisted of case record reviews, staff interviews, client contacts, and external stakeholder interviews. In this review, the external stakeholders interviewed were Juvenile Justice, and the Foster Care Review Board.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SAMPLE INFORMATION

Program under review	Referrals Not Accepted As CPS Reports	CPS Investigation	CPS Treat. - Active	CPS Treat. - Closed	Foster Care - Active	Foster Care - Closed	Foster Home Licensing
Period Under Review	6/01/01 - 8/31/01	4/01/01 - 6/30/01	8/31/01	6/01/01- 8/31/01	8/31/01	6/01/01 - 8/31/01	8/31/01
Case Population for Period Under Review	23	30	18	9	0	4	0
Cases Sampled	20	20	18	9	0	4	0
Cases Reviewed	20	20	17	9	0	4	0

This report is in 3 major sections: the Review Summary by Critical Decision Points, the General Findings section outlining strengths and issues which may require action, and the Measures and Outputs section which applies the review findings to the Agency's Child Welfare Outcomes.

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REVIEW SUMMARY BY CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

Intake:

In our review of intake files, we found that decisions whether to accept or not accept referrals as CPS reports were generally appropriate. The intake documentation on file addressed probe interviewing by the intake worker and proper and consistent consideration by both the worker and supervisor of the allegations to determine whether or not to investigate. We did note, however, delays in updating referrals not accepted as CPS reports in SACWIS averaging 2 weeks. While not directly affecting the quality or appropriateness of the decision, the accuracy and reliability of systems data is affected by this delay.

Investigation:

Based on case review and staff interviews, the county usually responded with successful initial contacts quickly. However, we found in general that most investigative activity took place within the first 10 days to 2 weeks of the investigation. There were usually no followup contacts recorded to update the case circumstances when the case decision staffing was held. Documentation of investigative activities were usually complete and specific. Collateral contacts were generally documented, and staff when interviewed stated that some collateral contacts were made. Family contacts were brief and not all appropriate family members were contacted. Family group conferences were held and relative custody was considered in EPC cases, with the end result of relative placement in 3 of the 4 Foster Care closures..

We noted the county was effective in ensuring that Safety Plans were developed in instances where children were not removed. With limited followup contact during the investigation, however, the effectiveness of the Safety Plan in keeping the child(ren) safe was not assured. Based on the documentation, the safety and risk were thoroughly assessed for all children in the home at the initial contact.

Case Decision:

In the majority of investigations reviewed, supervisory review and guidance in the decision making process was well documented in case records and stated in staff interviews. In spite of the limited contacts the family during the investigation, case decisions were supported by the evidence documented in the case files or systems.

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The county was effective in making efforts to notify the parties involved in the investigation of the case decision. The notification of the case decision clearly explained the factors and actions determining the case decision. Since this is the only document received by the family and/or the alleged perpetrator, the notification should be considered as a “stand alone” document.

Case Transfer/Transition to Treatment and Foster Care:

Due to the small number of staff, Union DSS has an informal process of transferring cases from Investigations to CPS Treatment. Based on staff interviews and case record documentation, the initial contacts by staff usually occurred within 2 weeks of the case decision.

CPS (In-Home) Treatment/ Foster Care (Out of Home):

Assessment and Treatment Planning:

Based on the documents reviewed and interviews with staff, family assessment and case planning for CPS Treatment had considerable input or involvement from the family or affected service providers. Treatment Plans generally described specific tasks, goals, or desired changes in behavior.

During the time of this review, Union DSS had no children in Foster Care.

Service Delivery:

Based on case review and staff interviews, we found that the county was effective in transferring cases from Investigations to CPS Treatment. Initial contacts were made within 2 weeks, the actual initiation of services after placement or case decision generally was immediate and decreased the time of agency involvement.

Regular face-to-face contacts were documented for both CPS Treatment cases along with extensive telephone contacts. The ongoing assessment of safety of the child(ren) either in home or in care was clearly documented. The detail of what transpired in the various activities documented in the system was complete and descriptive.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of ongoing cases tended to focus on progress toward goal achievement via changes in behavior and/or circumstances. Supervisory

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involvement and guidance in CPS Treatment cases was well-documented and timely.

Closure:

CPS Treatment and Foster Care cases which were closed had extensive documentation of staffing and case evaluation activity which supported the decision to close. CPS Treatment cases generally were closed with input from the family, and service providers when appropriate in the decision to close or planning the closure of the case. We noted delays of 2 months before the closure was entered on the system. While not directly affecting the quality or appropriateness of the decision, the accuracy and reliability of systems data is affected by this delay.

Court Activity Foster Care (Out-of-Home):

We noted the Agency was generally in compliance with court orders in the cases reviewed.

Foster Home Licensing:

Union DSS currently has no licensed foster homes. Union DSS has a joint foster home recruitment plan with York DSS.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The findings below affect the quality of the casework and service delivery either directly or indirectly. They are based on staff interviews, stakeholder interviews, client interviews, case records, computer system review, and review of the county outcome and performance analysis document.

STRENGTHS OF UNION COUNTY DSS.

1. Union DSS management staff have developed an system of meetings and briefings to ensure regular opportunities for discussion of case situations, supervisory input and guidance, and mutual decision making.
2. External stakeholders view the Union DSS Director and staff as a positive force in improving service delivery in the community.
3. Union DSS is responsive in initiating investigations quickly and

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making initial contacts with families after case decisions. Union DSS is also effective in developing alternatives to placement of children in foster care, either through relatives or stabilizing the home to ensure the safety of children.

ISSUES REQUIRING POSSIBLE ACTION IN UNION COUNTY DSS:

1. When caseworkers were interviewed and asked about specific cases, they were generally able to describe ongoing activities and contacts which were not documented. Lack of time was the common reason given for delays in documenting or not documenting activities fully. Several staff work after hours to complete documentation.
2. Union DSS currently has no licensed foster homes nor a plan for recruitment of foster homes.

Overall, Union DSS is a stable operation in a low population county. Most cases are resolved without the use of Foster Care in any long term fashion. Union DSS has developed an informal framework of operations which provide many opportunities for ongoing supervisory involvement and support as well as mutual decision making with clients in active CPS Treatment cases.

Throughout the review, we noted discrepancies between documentation in the hard copy case file and SACWIS. This raises a question as to the accuracy of the systems information provided in the Measures and Outputs section of this report. Staff who were interviewed reported activities which were not documented, which raises an issue of the effectiveness of current documentation practices.

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MEASURES AND OUTPUTS

Outcome 1: Increase permanency for children in Foster Care (Safe and Stable Home for Every Child)

Measure	Source	County		State	
		#	%	#	%
Total Children in Care	SACWIS	0	100%	4862	100%
Children in care more than 12 months	SACWIS	0	0.00%	3052	62.77%
In care more than 12 months where permanency hearing has not been held	SACWIS	0	0.00%	1044	34.21%
Children in care for whom permanency plan has not been achieved within 3/6 months after permanency planning hearing	SACWIS	Report under development			

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

Outcome 2: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Adoption

Measure	County		State	
	#	Months	#	Months
Average number of months in foster care until adoption is final	0	N/A	469	46.40
Average number of days/months in foster care after permanency planning hearing approves a plan of TPR or adoption for the child	Report under development			
Average number of days/months in foster care after TPR is granted	Report under development			

Summary: Not applicable in this county.

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Outcome 3: Improve Child Well-Being

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and adolescents attending school and performing: passing grades, maintaining grade level, school readiness (1 st), truancy, suspensions/expulsions, literacy, diploma/GED, secondary education	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Number and percentage of children and adolescents who show physical and mental health is stable or improving (therapy, screenings)	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Number and percentage of children with substance abuse are stable or improving	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Number and percentage of runaways	0	0.00%	95	1.95%
Number and percentage who age out of foster care and failed to meet goals	Report under development			
Number and percentage who become pregnant	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Number and percentage who are adjudicated for delinquency: once, more than once.	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

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**Outcome 4: Reduce Time in Foster Care to Reunification Without
Increasing Re-entry**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children who show physical and mental health stability and/or improvement	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Number and percentage of parents with substance abuse who are stable and/or improving	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Average number of family/relative visits per child per month (parents, other relatives)	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Number of children who return to foster care after reunification within 12 months	0	0.00%	201	8.72%

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

**Outcome 5: Reduce Placements of Young Children in Group Homes or
Institutions (Federal Requirements)**

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children age 12 years and below placed in group homes or institutions	0	0.0%	272	100%

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

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Outcome 6: Reduce/Prevent Abuse of Children in Foster Care

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of children in foster care with substantiated or indicated maltreatment by a foster parent or facility staff person	0	0.00%	98	100%

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

Outcome 7: Increase Stability of Placements and Other Aspects of Foster Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children in foster care with more than two placements	0	0.00%	2690	55.53%

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

Outcome 8: Increase Stability of Children's Lives

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Percentage of children who change schools/schools systems:	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			
Once				
More than once				
Percentage of cases with more than one change in foster care case workers	No Children were in Foster Care during the review period.			

Summary: No Children were in Foster Care in Union County during the review period.

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Outcome 9: Reduce/Prevent Abuse and Neglect of Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of indicated cases of child abuse and/or neglect:	2	100.00%	293	46.00%
Total				
Among high-risk populations	Report under development			
Number of fatalities among children known to the agency	Reported Elsewhere			

Summary: Union DSS has regular staffing procedures in place to address effective case decision-making. In actual practice, Investigations are well-documented and support the case findings, although not using agency forms or formats. Case decisions, however, tend to be based on limited contact with the family and collateral contacts.
Ongoing assessment of child safety in active CPS Treatment cases is clearly documented.

Outcome 10: Reduce/Prevent Recurrence of Child Abuse and Neglect

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of the 1 st indicated report	Report under development			
Number and percentage of cases of children with 2 nd indicated report within 12 months of reunification	Report under development			

Summary: We noted that most cases reviewed had prior CPS history, either of unfounded reports, active agency involvement, or not accepted at referral.

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Outcome 11: Limit the Number of Abused and/or Neglected Children Entering Foster Care to Those Who are Truly Endangered in Their Home

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children court ordered into placement	0	0.00%	1131	23.26%
Number and percentage of children placed informally (with relatives)	0	0.00%	269	5.53%
Number and percentage of treatment cases closed with risk reduced and treatment goals achieved (i.e. parents' and children's physical/mental health and safety improved)	3	14.29%	360	7.24%

Summary: The involvement of clients and service providers in the CPS Treatment closure decision, supports the validity of the number above.

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Outcome 12: Minimize Intrusion upon the Lives of Families and Children

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number and percentage of children and families, when asked, indicate/feel that the agency intruded in their lives:	In the client interviews conducted, all interviewees felt the involvement of the agency was an intrusion into their lives.			
Where services are provided (community based)	Interviews and case record reviews indicated the provision of services was often not available in the community but was planned to be as near to the client as available.			
How we deliver services (mutual planning)	In client interviews and in case record reviews, mutual planning was occurring.			
When services are provided (convenient hours)	Most interviews reported that it was possible to arrange convenient times for service to be provided.			
How clients were treated (respect and dignity)	Clients interviewed reported that they were involved in planning, and their opinions were respected.			
Number of days/weeks from achievement of treatment goals to case closure in treatment cases	Report under development			

Summary: There are regular staffings with other agencies, and the exchange of progress reports was clearly documented.

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Outcome 13: Increase Supply of Foster Home Placement Slots

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of licensed foster home placement slots	0	100%	1695	100%
Kinship care	Report under development			
Placements that fit	Report under development			
Close to home	Report under development			

Summary: Union DSS currently has no licensed foster homes nor a plan for recruitment of foster homes.

Outcome 14: Increase Number of Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions finalized	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)

Outcome 15: Reduce Number of Disrupted Adoptions

Measure	County		State	
	#	%	#	%
Number of adoptions disrupted within 12 months of finalization	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Summary: Not Reviewed (Separate Organization)